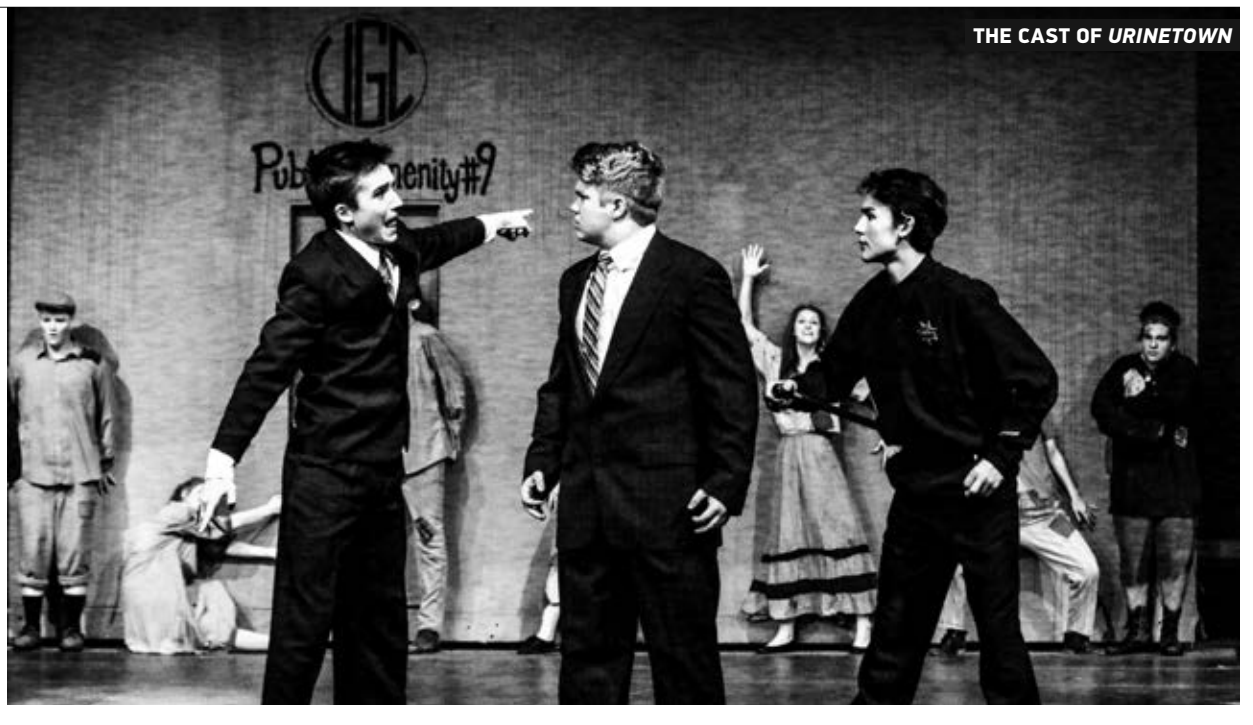
PUBLIC AMENITY NO. 1

South Eugene High School nails season opener Urinetown


THE CAST OF *URINETOWN*

A delightfully satirical sendup, 2001's *Urinetown: The Musical* by Mark Hollmann and Greg Kotis, pokes fun at everyone, from poet Bertolt Brecht and *Les Miz*, to our legal system, politics and capitalism. Refreshingly irreverent, *Urinetown* is a musical's musical, and it's given the five-star treatment by the capable team at South Eugene High School (SEHS).

In *Urinetown*, we're sometime in the future and private toilets have been outlawed. The right to pee (first time for everything: I just wrote "pee" in a review) has been overtaken by corporations, who consistently raise the rates on the one "Public Amenity" in town. (If Aristotle went looking for a dramatic "incentive moment," he need not look much further than an entire populace forced to hold it.)

Pat Avery directs this stellar cast, with choreography by Adam Kelly and musical and vocal direction by Doug Dorfoert and Chris Dobson. Vikki Brabham conducts the show's tiny but fierce band.

The show centers on a post-apocalyptic romance between Hope Cladwell (Abigail Howell) — the daughter of the evil CEO — and her scrappy Urinetown boyfriend, Bobby Strong (Simon Luedtke).

Howell's voice is clear and resonant, and her character has just the right combination of wide-eyed wonder and feisty fortitude. Luedtke, too, possesses terrific tenor richness and acting chops to match, grounding the production with his confident, yet funny portrayal.

Other standouts include Emelia Reed as Little Sally, Sage Siepert as Caldwell B. Cladwell, Lucy Geller as Pennywise and Kyra Siegel as a very pregnant Little Becky Two Shoes.

The entire ensemble plows through the work with gusto, singing and dancing their hearts out. You get the sense that they're enjoying the opportunity to show just how smart, and aware, kids and teens really are.

(When my 9-year-old asked me how the show was, and I described the basic plot, he said, "That sounds like it could happen.")

Sobering perhaps, but trust me: The show is really funny.

SEHS's stagecraft class constructs sets. Costumes, lights and sound are all designed and executed by students.

But before you dismiss this as merely a show by and for teens, consider that many of your beloved Oregon Ducks are not yet of legal drinking age — they're just "college kids" — yet you'd pay top dollar to watch them play.

So give South Eugene Theater a chance, because despite deep and consistent cuts to arts education, they're consistently churning out some of the finest musical productions in town.

Urinetown *continues Nov. 5, 6, 8*, 12, 13, 14 at 7 pm (*2 pm matinee) in the South Eugene High School Auditorium, 400 E. 19th Ave.; $10-$15. More info at southeugenetheater.org.*

HAIL TO THEE, MY OREGON!

Bob Welch & Friends returns to the Hult

Former *Register-Guard* columnist Bob Welch spins his popular Oregon stories for a live audience, Nov. 5-6.

"I had a great ride for 24 years and I wanted to find a way to say thank you," Welch says.

Enter live theater.

"It's a celebration of our state in stories, songs, images and, of course, s'mores," Welch says.

An Oregon native, Welch is clearly smitten.

"I love that you can start at sea level, and end the day at the summit of the Sisters," Welch says. "Oregonians have a passion for the state's natural beauty. We have that in common. This is our home."

Welch's career encouraged him to explore Oregon's scenic vistas. And retirement has persuaded him to share those stories in a new setting.

"I like to try new things," Welch says. "And to ask myself, 'Could I do this?' Thanks to amazing support staff, people like Judy, we did it."

Welch's director, Judy Wenger, is a 30-year teaching veteran, who's directed countless productions for kids.

"I'd have to say that the big difference in normal directing, and working with Bob, is that it's his material. He's the expert," Wenger says. "In trusting me, he listens to what I have to say — And if he questions what I have to say, I taught middle school. I'm used to questions."

So what can audiences expect?

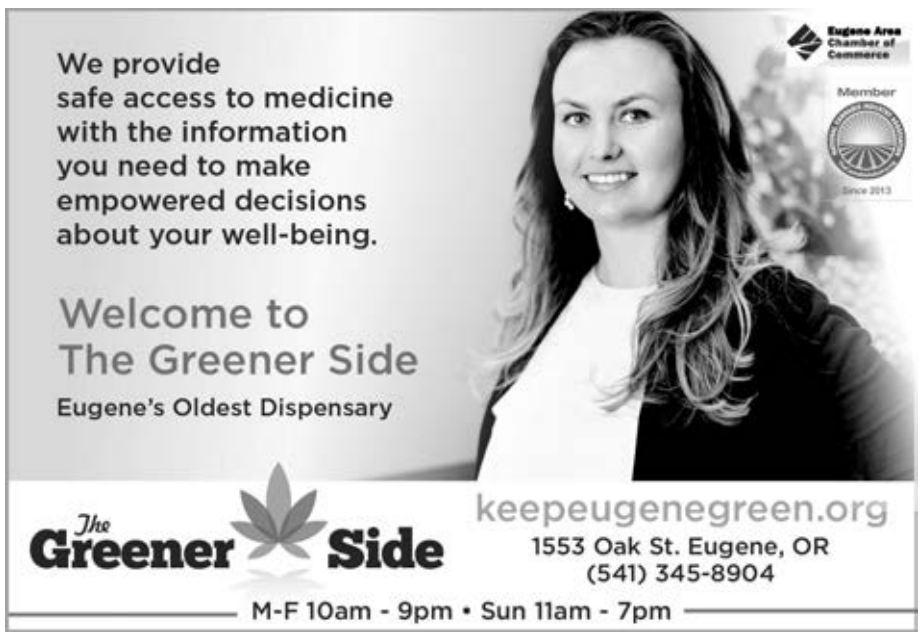
"This is no travelogue," Welch says. "It's a romp across the state, east to west, that we hope will have people laughing, reflecting and falling in love all over again with this beautiful place."

Cellist-guitarist Dale Bradley, violinist-violist Lisa McWhorter and pianist-cellist Peter Norland, along with comedic poet David Perham, join Welch onstage.

The show features photography by Stan Newman, Jason Friesen, Laren and JerriLynn Woolley, Jorma Meriaho and Eric Valentine, as well as a video piece by Ryan Welch.

And, as if it couldn't get any cozier, quilts by Jennifer Rabner, Sally Welch and the Something to Crow About quilt shop will decorate the stage.

Last year's inaugural production played to a sold-out house. This year, they've added a performance.

And yes, there will be free s'mores at intermission.

Catch "Bob Welch & Friends" 7:30 pm Thursday and Friday, Nov. 5-6, at the Hult Center; $27-$35; group discounts (10 or more tickets) are available for $29.75 and $23, respectively. Tickets for college age and below are $15. Tickets are available at hultcenter.org, by phone at 682-5000 or at the Hult Center box office.